1:Seligmann & Seligmann E-5 (1907-1908) 1911
AX5 Vedda AX5

CHAPTER VIII

MAGIC

789 In the chapters upon religion we have described those ceremonies and observances of the Veddas which depend for their efficacy upon the successful appeal to some extra-human personal influence. In this section we shall discuss a number of actions which we consider magical, that is, actions which are expected to produce the required result automatically by virtue of their own intrinsic qualities.

One of the first things we noted during our stay in the Vedda country was the very slight part which magic played in the life of the Veddas. The more we saw of the people the more convinced we became of this. It seems to us that among the uncontaminated Veddas of two or three generations ago magical practices were almost entirely absent, and even at the present day the few remaining Veddas who have not been much exposed to foreign influence have scarcely any customs that are truly magical.

789 266 We include in this chapter the custom which formerly existed of eating a small piece of human liver in times of great stress, for even if this custom be not considered magical in the strict sense, it is clearly based on principles which lie at the root of many magical beliefs.

789 Since it is important to make thoroughly clear the absence of many forms of magic, we shall consider the condition of the different communities with regard to some of the most commonly occurring forms.

MAGIC DIRECTED AGAINST THE INDIVIDUAL.

754 This is completely absent except among the village Veddas, which is all the more surprising in view of the extraordinary

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AX5 Vedda AX5

prevalence among the Sinhalese of magic having for its object the production of disease and death. Even the Henebedda Veddas, who have adopted a number of Sinhalese charms against animals, do not believe in this form of magic. The presence of a woman with wasting of both legs and contracture, the result of a long-standing ulcerative process of obscure origin which developed spontaneously, enabled this to be tested.

Although we discussed this woman's condition with a number of Veddas it was only once suggested, and then very doubtfully, that it might have been due to Sinhalese *kuniyam* magic[1], and it was clear that to the community generally this woman's disease was simply an accident, the origin of which they did not understand and did not trouble about.

Though Veddas, and especially Vedda women, are extremely shy there is no belief in the evil eye, or in the danger of being "overlooked."

Charms protective against Animals.

The bear is the only animal that the Veddas really fear, and there is no doubt that a number of Veddas and jungle-dwelling Sinhalese are mauled each year, indeed, at least one man in each community that we visited bore the marks of the bear's paws. Bear's flesh is not eaten and we doubt if Veddas ever voluntarily attack a bear, though there is no doubt that they sometimes kill one that has attacked them. Hence, the bear is called the "enemy" and his name is seldom mentioned nor is he represented among the rock paintings at Pihilegodagalge although the leopard, who steals the Vedda dogs and is hated in consequence, is represented. When questioned on the subject our male informants said nothing, but a number of women looked surprised and one said quite decidedly that no one would paint a bear. The words used in speaking of the bear are of

[1] That the *kuniyam* idea was foreign to the one Vedda who suggested it, was proved by the results of further questioning, when our informant gave an outline of one of the commonest Sinhalese beliefs as to the method of preparation and action of *kuniyam* charms. The reference to *kuniyam* in one of the "Vedda charms" published by Mr De Zoysa (*Journal Ceylon Branch R. A. S.*, Vol. VII, 1881, p. 103), cannot be taken to invalidate our conclusions, for many of these charms show undoubted Sinhalese influence.

2:Bailey G-5 (ca. 1854) 1863
AX5 Vedda AX5

But dogs are still prized by the Veddah. Of all his possessions, he values most his bow, which is placed under his head when he sleeps; and next in his estimation is the dog who guards it, sleeping always at his master's head. "What would you do," I asked a Veddah once, "if your bow were stolen?" "No one could steal it," he replied; "the dog would not let him." "But if any one killed your dog." His answer was significant. He clutched his axe, and made a motion as though he would cut down the man who did so.

And this was no idle threat. In 1849, a Bintenne Veddah deliberately knocked a man's brains out, for having, as he believed, killed two of his dogs by magic.* He never attempted to deny what he had done. "It is true," he said at the coroner's inquest, "I killed him, and I did so because he had killed, by witchcraft, the two dogs I had reared and hunted with for my support." He added, as quite a secondary justification, that the murdered man had also practised his magic arts on himself. He detailed, with great minuteness, how he lay wait for him, and how, while he, with his wife and child, was resting in the shade, he watched his opportunity, and felled him with a club: and—strong evidence of the proverbial truthfulness of the Veddahs—he described how, by his influence (he was the head man of one of the small tribes), he intimidated the widow and father of his victim, and so kept the murder secret for some days.

None but the woman saw the deed; and had falsehood been the normal characteristic of the Veddahs, as I fear it is with too many of their more civilized compatriots, he would probably have escaped punishment. He was tried and convicted of murder, but the sentence of death was commuted to several years imprisonment. It was hoped that, having received some instructions in goal, he might carry back with him some little civilization to his own people.

But imprisonment was to him a greater punishment than death. He pined away in confinement, and was released to save his life. I have often seen him in Bintenne. Civilization has not done much for him. He differs from his brethren only in having acquired a taste for jewelry, for he wears with apparent pride, a tawdry brass chain round his waist.

The Veddahs eat the flesh of elk,† deer, monkeys, pigs, the iguano, and pengolin—all flesh, indeed, but that of oxen, elephants,

* The murdered man was not a Veddah, but a low-country vagrant; several of whom have, of late years, taken up their abode near the Bintenne Veddahs, to their great annoyance.

† What is commonly termed an elk in Ceylon, is the Samba deer (*rusa Aristotelis*).

2:Bailey G-5 (ca. 1854) 1863
AX5 Vedda AX5

it is only because, after repeated and careful inquiry, I cannot establish the fact of such a marriage now actually existing, that I am inclined to consider that it is becoming obsolete. But I should be almost justified as describing it as an existing custom, for many of the young men are the offspring of such connections. The practice is spoken of by them in the present tense, and alluded to as a matter of course, without the smallest repugnance.*

Amongst the Bintenne Veddahs, then, it may be said to have been, for perhaps two generations or so, extinct. Amongst those of Nilgala it is, at most, only becoming so. And it has, undoubtedly, been the custom among both from time immemorial. Utterly revolting as it is to us, we must remember that with them it was a custom sanctioned by the practice of ages. It is not the consequence of a "poor community," nor the growth of mere barbarism. If it were, the elder sister would be equally sought after; if it were, polygamy in all its forms would be found among them. There would, in fact, be no restraint.†

I have before described the short stature of the Veddahs—their weak and vacant expression, their striking resemblance to each other, characteristics much more marked upon the Veddahs of Nilgala than those of Bintenne. The practice I have just noticed is quite sufficient to account for these.

It might naturally be supposed that such marriages would produce, besides a stunted growth, insanity, idiocy, and epilepsy. But I find few traces of these maladies. Madness rarely occurs, idiocy still less frequently; though dogged stupidity is not at all uncommon amongst them.‡ But in other respects the injurious effects of this custom would seem to be plainly discernible. The

* I am not surprised that Tennent should be ignorant of this custom. It is a most difficult task to obtain intelligible answers to the commonest questions from these ignorant creatures; and unless a clue to some subject is accidentally found, the inquirer would learn little. There are practices as revolting, though not so peculiar, among some of the Indian tribes.

† It is curious that the only trace I can find of anything approaching to a belief in retributive justice is a tradition of a man, whose name even has been preserved, and whose family still exists, who, they say, was eaten by worms for having exceeded the authorized limit, and formed connections with his elder sisters and aunts. By whom this punishment was inflicted they do not pretend to say; but the painful death they regard as the direct consequence of his incest.

‡ Madness is by no means common among them. They believe if one man curse another, the man who is cursed becomes mad. This is evidently the same superstition as is common among the Singhalese, and known as the "Kata waha," "the evil mouth," or "poison of the mouth," equivalent to the prevalent faith in the "Ess waha," "the evil eye," or "poison of the eye." Burton, in his *El Medinah Mecca*, says, "the national type has been preserved by systematic intermarriages. No evil results are anticipated from the union of first cousins; and the experience of ages and of a nation may be trusted."